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ABSTRACT

Issues that confront the dual career family, a family in which both parents work outside the home and are actively involved in developing a profession, are discussed. This report focuses on issues relative to married couples with children and specifically to college faculty couples. Modifications in life style required in these circumstances are discussed and it is suggested that while educational equality for men and women is increasing there are relatively few dual career marriages. Traditional career advancement is viewed as discriminatory toward women. Women's professional career patterns are examined and four stages are noted: (1) marriage; (2) childbearing; (3) professional preparation; and (4) the assumption or resumption of professional practice. The distribution of household and parenting responsibilities is discussed as well as financial problems and the effects of dual career marriages on children. Specifics of various types of marital relationships are discussed as they relate to the success of dual careers. Competition is viewed as a substantial hurdle in dual career marriages. Conditions that employers and society can create to make dual career marriages easier to attain are proposed. It is recommended that rational, cooperative decision-making will augment the success of a dual career marriage. (SF)

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The Dual Careers of Faculty and Family: Can They Both be Done Well?

Part 3: Observations from the Field

Jean O'Barr

Discussions about the feasibility and/or desirability of dual career faculty families abound these days. In undergraduate classrooms the faculty of tomorrow asserts that they'll have both career and family with no problem. The faculty of today looked at them with a mixture of bemusement and frustration, realizing they will see things differently in their late twenties wher real, not theoretical, choices must be made. On faculty search committees members try to judge how likely it is that candidate X will come and what influence the career of the spouse of X will have on the decision. Over the lunch table in the faculty dining room, individuals talk about how they deal with the multiple choices and pressures of dual career marriages. More and more people debate the question addressed by this panel. Can both be done well? And with what consequences?

I want to discuss the conditions which enhance the feasibility of successful dual career marriages and how we can respond creatively to the challenges that dual career couples pose so that both the individual and the institution prosper. My observations are based on two sets of experiences. As Director of Continuing Education at Duke, I am involved in counseling faculty, students, and community people making life-work decisions. These personal contacts leave one with the strong conviction

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that more and more people seek to constructively mesh the two. As a member of the political science faculty, I teach a course on the two career family and public policy;[1] I also work with colleagues concerned with the impact of university policies on two career families.

Before analyzing the issues as I see them, I think several preliminary points are in order. The first point concerns definitions. Many American families are two worker families -- families in which both the woman and the man have salaried employment outside the home. Another sizable portion of American families are what the sociologist Papanek[2] called two person-one career families -- the intact families in which both the man and woman put their energies into the development of his career. She types the papers, runs the household, raises the children, entertains the associates, and undertakes the civic duties while he progresses through professional school, into middle management, and eventually to the "top" of his profession. The two career family differs from these other modes in that both the woman and man work outside the home and both are actively involved in developing a profession and a lifestyle which demands intense involvement -- long hours and psychic energy. In dual career families the question of who performs the household tasks and how any given decision affects the long-range success of each partner takes on heightened significance.

My comments are addressed to the situation surrounding intact marriages, not to the work-family situations of single parents, a slightly different, although no less important situation. My focus is particularly on families in which there are children. Marriage itself between two professional people involves some modifications

in the plans and styles of the two individuals. But it is the arrival of children, more than marriage, which brings the dual career question to the fore. My counseling experiences suggest that most marriages can accommodate two thriving careers -- what they find difficult to accommodate is two careers plus two children.

A third point needs to be made: men and women are increasingly gaining parity in education, at least at the B.A. level. Equal numbers of women and men finish college, with similar grades, albeit with different career fields. Larger numbers of women go on to post-baccalaureate work and larger numbers of them finish higher training. In spite of the growing levels of educational attainment of women, however, the earnings gap between men and women continues to grow, and advancement beyond the "middle" (however it's defined in a particular career field) rarely happens for women. Advancement to the top of any field is highly dependent on subjective factors. When women seek to reach the top, their family-work factors situations take on additional salience.

Finally, I think we need to ask -- just how many dual career marriages are there? We know that over fifty percent of American women now work outside the home; some of them must pursue careers parallel to those of their husbands. People can always cite "the example" -- "my son-in-law went with my daughter while she finished graduate school and now. . ." The problem in the isolated example is just that: it does not illustrate the general pattern. A review of the descriptive literature on dual career families shows that most are junior-senior relationships.[3] Both women and men have careers, but hers is almost always secondary in some respect -- it got started after his, rarely

before; she earns less, although she loves it more; she works part time by choice; her's is in an ill-defined area, perhaps an organizational cul de sac, while his is main line and has a well understood career path, etc. Analysis suggests that for every ten dual career situations we might identify, eight or nine of them are situations in which the woman is the junior partner in terms of status, perceptions, rewards.

Having tried to mention some preliminary points that seem to me to establish the parameters within which we are talking, let me make a series of observations about how I see dual career marriages functioning in the university setting. I want to argue that while the number of dual career families is quite small and likely to remain so given societal conditions, modifying university structures to accommodate them is a high priority for at least three reasons: it directly benefits the university-as-employer by shoring up faculty morale in a period of retrenchment; it demonstrates to the broader community of students and public that alternative work patterns are both feasible and desirable; it provides concrete evidence to those trained by the university that women can expect to use their educations in ways of direct benefit to society and to themselves.

1. The path to traditional career advancement is stacked against women in the sense that the demands and timing for success leave no life space for personal considerations -- indeed success often demands a helpmate. The problem was brilliantly stated by Hochschild in an essay called "Inside the Clockwork of Male Careers."[4] She says careers are seen as a series of contests "which in turn are based not

so much on doing good work as on getting credit for doing good work." In her analysis she shows how neither discrimination nor fear of success limit women so much as a reward system which favors the married family-free man. "Nonetheless, I think we have what amounts to a tacit policy toward the family. Let us consider the following: if all else were equal, who would be most likely to survive under the career system -- a man married to a full-time housewife and mother; or a man whose wife has a nine-to-five job and the children in day care; or a man who works part-time, as does his wife, while their children are small? I think the general principle that determines the answer is this: To the extent that his family (1) does not positively help him in his work or (2) makes demands on his time and psychic energy that compete with those devoted to his job, they lower his chances for survival. This is true insofar as he is competing with other men whose wives either aid them or do not interfere with their work. Other things being equal, the university rewards the married family-free man." Because most women are not married family-free men, their chances for successful careers are reduced. And the numbers involved in dual career marriages are small.

2. Dual career marriages seem most likely to occur when the timing of marriage and the arrival of children do not interrupt the woman's professional preparation and practice. Bernard[5] showed that there are eight possible career patterns when the four major contingencies in the careers of women -- namely (1) marriage, (2) child bearing, (3) professional preparation, and (4) the assumption or resumption of professional practice -- are considered. In studies of successful women she found

the critical variable to be the timing in the break between preparation and career assumption. Women who married and reared children before their education and professional launching or women who delayed family and children until after they were successfully established were more successful than those who began child rearing after the completion of their education but before assumption of their professional roles. The pattern Bernard calls early-interrupted (education, marriage, children, assumption of career) is related to lack of success -- and it is clearly the pattern most commonly followed by young couples. Here is a second societal condition which works against the establishment of successful dual career marriages.

3. There seems to be little change in the pattern of how household tasks are distributed.[6] Overall, dual career families appear to spend less time on housework tasks. In dual career families, children take more responsibility, and husbands contribute slightly more. But sociological research shows that women continue to put in more hours per week on routine household tasks than do men. The result of this is (1) less time for professional pursuits on the part of women, (2) less leisure time to work off fatigue, develop interests, and simply rest from the pressures of the job, and (3) a reinforcement within the family of the power relationships in society at large where men command the options.

4. Women in dual career marriages still seem to be the major psychic parent. Jean Curtis developed this term to refer to the situation well known to people in most dual marriages. Yes, dad did take Mary to the dentist. But it was mom who (1) remembered that Mary

needed to go to the dentist, (2) made the appointment, (3) wrote the note to get Mary excused from school and reminded her to take it to school, (4) saw that Mary brushed her teeth and wore one of her least disruptable pairs of jeans that day, (5) reminded dad to take Mary the morning of the appointment, (6) paid the bill when it came in the mail, and (7) posted the next six month appointment on the family calendar afterwards. Psychic parenthood involves a lot more than simple numbers of hours spent in cleaning and laundering. And psychic parenthood, along with household tasks, does not seem to be shared equally between partners in a marriage.

5. Research on women in dual career marriages shows that fatigue and lack of recreational interest is a serious physical and mental health problem. Conversation with faculty women will reveal the same. They work hard and are good scholars and teachers; they are conscientious parents. But they cut off the leisure and recreational activities that are sustaining over the long run because they simply lack the time.[7]

6. One question which is raised again and again is just what effect dual career marriages have on children. The early research, based on a suspect methodology and growing out of certain biases, emphasized the negative effects. More recent work concludes that the children of dual career marriages are at least unaffected and at best encouraged to be more independent by two working parents.[8]

7. Money helps ease many of the tensions which arise in dual career marriages. Couples who have both been established in their careers for some time, couples who practice in high-return specialties or couples who have family resources to draw on are in a favored position.

Clearly, money will purchase the services that family requires but which neither parent is able to provide -- household help, prepared meals, efficient appliances, services in the house and yard.

8. One particular practice which contributes to a successful dual career marriage is the one in which an older man remarries or marries for the first time a woman younger than himself. He has established himself career-wise; he may have already begun a family. His marriage to a younger woman -- often someone he meets professionally who is also well established -- leads them into a very different situation than his first marriage or hers if she were marrying a younger person going through the career build-up stage with her. They may decide not to have children of their own, but enjoy his. He seems more willing to compromise and be flexible, allowing her to develop her career -- presumably because he has already done so. She has the security of his experience to share; she does not deal with the competition between them.

9. Little data is available on how long term commuting relationships work out. The practice of two professionals holding jobs in separate areas while maintaining their family life has become more widespread in the last few years. I know of no relationships at Duke which are more than two years old. The few which have lasted longer resulted in a move for one of the partners.

10. Discussions of how dual career marriages operate always take a problem-solving focus, e.g., how do the people involved work out the inevitable structural and personal conflicts? There is another way to look at these marriages, e.g., how do the multiple work and family

roles of men and women in two career marriages interrelate to reinforce and assist one another? What benefits derive from a sharing of both personal and professional activities? Such interaction can be highly positive. Each partner learns from the experiences of the other; each has a colleague who understands the situation and can offer helpful advice.

11. I have said relatively little about the role of competition between spouses in dual career marriages. Certainly competition exists; it can operate constructively or destructively, depending on a wide variety of factors. I believe the competition question is overstated by those who observe dual career marriages. I find the talk about the potential negative effects of competition comes more often from the dean or chairperson contemplating it than from the individuals living it.

12. A final observation: in successful dual career marriages, not only do women succeed in the work place, men assume broader domestic responsibilities and develop the nurturant side of themselves. Involvement in the home and in child care teaches a whole new set of skills and reinforces usually ignored emotions to many men. This development of their expressive side is not only personally rewarding to those who do it. It can bring new perspectives to their university work -- no, the executive committee cannot meet on Sunday afternoon; no, female candidate X's break of five years in her education does not imply she lacks motivation; yes, leadership skills developed in community organizations may very well transfer into university situations.

I have tried in making these observations to suggest how I see dual career marriages operating at this point in time. What of the

future? What are we likely to see? What conditions can we create as a society or as employers to make dual career marriages easier to attain?[10]

1. Most of the tensions in dual career marriages seem to me to surface when the woman, who entered the marriage as the helpmate to the man and as the mother of his future children, decides that she has aspirations of her own and that their marriage relationship will have to be modified in order to accommodate her emerging interests. The view of marriage as a fixed contract and of change as the woman's failure to live up to her responsibilities, a view frequently expressed by men, seems most dramatically in need of change.

2. The breakdown of the idea that each person has only one career is equally critical. The realization that each person in fact has a series of careers throughout the adult life cycle and that flexibility can be introduced without losing face is necessary.

3. Alternate work patterns would help enormously. Job pairing, job sharing, part-time work, paid educational leaves would all contribute flexibility to the employment situation. Increased flexibility in turn would mean that more individuals could make choices which would insure equity in their marriages because they would be reassured that the choices they made would not lock them in to particular situations.

4. When any given couple is making a decision -- can he get an internship and she get into a graduate program in the same locale -- there is a tendency to rely on "rational" criteria. That is, he should go to the most prestigious place he can for his internship because he, the medical doctor, will always make more money than she, the future professor of public policy. Rational in these cases always translates

into amounts of money and commonly accepted standards of prestige. So not only does their original choice of career fields put him ahead in the status game, future decisions exacerbate the differences between them. Recognition of this process can lead to the decision that because a professorship in social science is less financially rewarding and possibly lower in status, the training decision ought to be made in her favor -- she gets into the best school she can, and he takes whatever internship is available. This decision is "rational" on new grounds -- the effects it will have on the future equity between them.[9]

NOTES

[1]A copy of the syllabus for The Changing Roles of Women and Men: Dual Career Families is available for $1.00 from the Office of Continuing Education, 107 Bivins Building, Duke University, Durham, N. C. 27708.

[2]Hanna Papanek, "Men, Women and Work: Reflections on the Two Person Career," American Journal of Sociology 78(4), pp. 852-872.

[3]The literature on dual career families deals almost exclusively with professional, usually faculty, families. The following sources are illustrative:

Jean Curtis, Working Mothers, New York: Doubleday, 1976.

Lenore Hoffman and Gloria DeSale (eds.), Careers and Couples: An Academic Question, The Modern Language Association, 1976.

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Rhona Rapoport and Robert Rapoport, Dual Careers Re-examined: New Integrations of Work and Family, New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniels (eds.), Working It Out: 23 Women Writers, Artists, Scientists and Scholars Talk About Their Lives and Work, New York: Pantheon, 1977.

[4]Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Inside the Clockwork of Male Careers," in Florence Howe (ed.), Women and the Power to Change, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975, pp. 47-80.

[5]Jessie Bernard, Women and the Public Interest, Chicago: Aldine, 1971.

[6]There are few recent empirical studies of the division of household tasks. The assumption in recent work is that little has changed. References include:

Stephen Bahr, "Effects of Power and Division of Labor in the Family," in Lois Hoffman and F. Ivan Nye (eds.), Working Mothers, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974, pp. 167-185.

Nona Glazer, "Housework: A Review Essay," in Nona Glazer and Helen Wachrer (eds.), Woman in a Man-Made World, 2nd edition, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977, pp. 360-369.

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F. Ivan Nye, "Husband-Wife Relationship," in Hoffman and Nye, Working Mothers, pp. 186-206.

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Laurel Walum, The Dynamics of Sex and Gender: A Sociological Perspective, Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1977, especially pp. 167-188, "The Political Economics of House Life."

[7]Anita Farel, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, personal communication based on data from large scale study of professional women.

[8]Lois Hoffman, "Effects of Maternal Employment on the Child," Developmental Psychology 10(2), 1974, pp. 204-228.

[9]Joseph Pleck, "The Psychology of Sex Roles: Traditional and New Views," in Libby Cater et al, Women and Men: Changing Roles, Relationships, and Perceptions, Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1976, pp. 181-199.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Work and Family in the United States: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research and Policy, Russell Sage Foundation, 1977.